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SUBJECT: SUMMER UNIVERSITY EVALUATES REFORMS IN MOROCCO

¶1. (U) Summary: From July 13 to 15 the Moroccan Center for Social Studies organized a summer university, i.e., a conference, in Tetouan to discuss and assess the reform process. Polfsn political specialist attended the conference. The participants, who were university professors, political analysts and students, discussed the new Family Law Code, human rights, press freedom and constitutional reform in a panel format with designated respondents. Although reforms started in Morocco as early as 1975, participants thought the most important ones have taken place since King Mohammed VI ascended to the throne. At the same time, some participants thought that only strategic plans will ensure the continuation and implementation of reforms. End Summary.

The Reform of the Family Code

¶2. (U) The Family Code, which became law in 2004, was the first sign that reforms were going to occur, according to most of the participants. Mohamed Sassi, a professor of law at Mohamed V University in Rabat, said that the code "was a significant change." At the same time, however, Sassi recognized that there are implementation problems. He noted that the code moved the law from the religious and sacred sphere into a civil legal framework, which he identified as a "tremendous transformation."

Human Rights

¶3. (U) University students thought the primary reform was in the area of human rights. Students applauded the Equity and Reconciliation Committee's (IER) work because it both implicitly and explicitly acknowledged the GOM's responsibility for human rights abuses during the period from 1956 to 1991. The Moroccan Association for Human Rights (AMDH) representative, Abdessalam Benabdeillah, however, considered the IER to be limited because it was established by the king. Amina Bouayach, president of the Moroccan Organization for Human Rights (OMDH), said that the IER was groundbreaking, but it will prove to be pointless if the government does not act on the recommendations. According to Bouayach, "with the report, at least we have an official document that acknowledges a state policy of systematic oppression and flagrant human rights violations, but it's not enough - in reality we need an ongoing effort."

Press Freedom

¶4. (U) Younes Moujahid, the Secretary General of the Moroccan Press Union, underlined the absence of a professional, independent press, noting that there is no code of ethics and that there is a lack of information, i.e., journalists do not do research. Mohamed

Brini, director of Al Ahdath Al Maghribia, an Arabic daily, noted that the press helped inform the public about the Family Law Code and other new laws. Brini, however, pointed out that, as long as prison sentences are part of the press code, there is no way to discuss press freedom.

Constitutional and Political Reform

¶5. (U) The political analysts agreed about the difficulty of democratic reforms. Abdallah Saaf, Director of the Center for Social Studies, supported parliament by pointing out that it has independent commissions. Sassi countered by saying "Moroccans simply don't think that they are represented. For them parliament is some kind of a political game between the political elites. They are corrupt. In short, the parliament is not a serious avenue or institution for representation."

¶6. (U) Mohamed Tozy, echoed Sassi's comments and said that the relationship between the monarchy, "state," and "government" is ambiguous. Because Moroccans have started to talk about these issues, though, Tozy also thinks there will be constitutional reform in the near future. He stated: "The most important story about Morocco is that the push for reform did not come from political parties, but from civil society -- human rights groups, women and Berbers. The political parties have not been at the front in terms of demanding reforms either because they have been co-opted or because they are ideologically not interested in democracy. And although civil society can accomplish a lot, there is a limit where you need political change and for that you need strong political parties and a strong parliamentary system."

¶7. (U) Defining the separation of powers between the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government remains an issue. Participants unanimously agreed that the monarchy will always have a prestigious and symbolic role, and power. Mohamed Darif, professor of political science at Hassan II University in Mohammedia pointed out the difference between how religion is integrated into Moroccan society and the constitution, and how this differs from a liberal democracy.

Is Morocco a Model for Arab Reform?

¶8. (U) Ahmed Bouz, editor of Assahifa, an Arabic daily, said using "model" is premature. He said "there is still a process that is unfolding. There are still too many issues to be resolved. What is going to work in Morocco will not necessarily work for Egypt or Saudi Arabia or Algeria." Saaf disagreed with Bouz saying that Morocco could be a model for the Arab world "because several Arab human rights activists and NGOs visited Morocco and met with members of the Equity and Reconciliation Committee. They all try to draw on this Moroccan experience. You adapt success stories to your own specificities, and there is nothing wrong with that. I hope that the Arab-Muslim and Berber-Muslim worlds still take on this example, Morocco as a model. It deserves to be taken as a model."

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